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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 002135

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DEPT TO WHA/CEN TLERSTON, PASS TO VALVARADO NSC, GMAGGIO DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2017
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL PINR KDEM NU
SUBJECT: NICARAGUAN CIVIL SOCIETY ALLIANCE UNITES AGAINST
CITIZEN COUNCILS

REF: A. MANAGUA 1944

1B. MANAGUA 2025
1C. MANAGUA 2043

Classified By: Amb. Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Some ten thousand Nicaraguan opposition members, political leaders, and regular citizens turned out for a rally organized by the pro-democracy civil society organization Movimiento por Nicaragua (MpN) on Sunday, September 9 in the streets of Masaya to voice a united opposition to the Ortega administration's Citizen Councils (Consejos de Poder Ciudadano or CPCs) and express solidarity for survivors of Hurricane Felix. The solid showing at the rally during a week marked by tragedy demonstrated civil society's ability to mobilize and broaden civic participation, as well as evidence of growing public concern over Ortega's efforts to consolidate power. End Summary.

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Leitmotif: Participation Without Manipulation
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12. (C) Poloff and Pol Assistant attended a September 9 march against the CPCs organized by MpN in the city of Masaya, 30 minutes from Managua, which proved to be an impressive, spirited event. The primary aim of the march was to "raise the voice of the people in defense of liberty" and to reject the Ortega government's attempts to consolidate its control through the CPCs (Ref A). Although organizers had some misgivings about holding the rally while the country was still mourning the tragedy of Hurricane Felix which struck the Atlantic Coast just six days earlier (Ref C), MpN Director Violeta Granera informed us that after consulting with affiliate organizations and MpN members in departments throughout the country, they decided to go ahead as planned. In MpN's view, it was important to continue the pressure on the government, and sustain the momentum gained from the National Assembly vote in favor of the reforms to Law 290 (Ref B) which would deny the executive the authority to institute the Councils.

13. (C) March organizers are concerned that Ortega could still seek other means to enact the Councils, including an appeal to the Supreme Court to declare the legislative reforms unconstitutional. To best register opposition the CPCs, MpN came up with "Participation without Manipulation" as the rally slogan that marchers both chanted and wore on blue and white T-shirts produced for the occasion. Organizers applauded the "honorable" National Assembly Deputies who had

the courage to vote against the CPCs. Marchers demanded an end to "authoritarianism, nepotism, and partisanship."

¶14. (U) Reading aloud from a public letter from MpN to President Ortega, Maria Antonieta Fiallos put the president on notice for failing to follow through on a number of campaign promises, using the CPCs to further divide the country, and inviting economic ruin through his confrontational rhetoric. Ortega was betraying his pledge to govern with peace and reconciliation and achieve a united Nicaragua, the letter argued, by calling the opposition "puppets" (peleles) and conspirators. Although he had promised zero unemployment, his public discourses and actions were scaring off private investment--foreign and domestic. Rather than upholding its promise to end corruption, the government, Fiallos contended, was further corrupting institutions of the state in order to maintain the Aleman-Ortega political pact. "Mr. President," Fiallos declared, "when you use government institutions to attack your political adversaries or protect your allies and followers, you are in violation of the rule of law and are fomenting corruption." For Nicaragua to grow and prosper, the country needs an impartial system of justice that complies with the law, not with the "interest of one caudillo or another," she added.

¶15. (U) The route commenced at the Plaza of Saint Jerome and ended at Plaza of Monimbo, where the official act of speeches was kicked off by the crowd singing in unison the Nicaraguan national anthem. Although exact numbers at the turnout were not confirmed, news reports of the event put the number close to 10,000. In the spirit of emphasizing national unity instead of political partisanship, the Nicaraguan national flag was ubiquitous, turning the march into a sea of blue and white, a stark contrast to the red and black that normally dominate FSLN events. Between the actual march and the speeches, the entire event lasted nearly two hours. And despite the hot sun, people stayed for the duration.

(Comment: One embassy officer heard from a contact that Sandinista officials were taking note of any government employees who showed up for work on Monday morning sunburned, as if that were evidence that they attended the opposition rally.)

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Opposition United In Opposition to CPCs, Danielismo
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¶16. (C) Nicaraguans, who are rarely at a loss for words, took full advantage of the rally to express their discontent, and reveled in anti-government sloganeering and political lampooning. The overall mood was buoyant, energetic, and sometimes irreverant, and everyone we observed seemed happy to be there. Freedom of expression often took the form of personal verbal attacks on the first couple, placards calling for an end of the Aleman-Ortega political pact, a stop to the government firings of civil servants, demands for more jobs, denunciations of corrupt judges and public officials, and a litany of other complaints against the government. "Degenerate judges, one day you will be judged," captured a typical sentiment. Another sign that stood out was "We are the 62%", in reference to the population that did not vote for the presidency of Daniel Ortega. Toward the end of the march, poloff noticed the sign had been changed; the 62 crossed out and replaced with a 70. The ALN mayor of Matiguas was proud of his production, a professionally printed banner which proclaimed Matiguas the cradle of democracy, with the slogan "No to the Citizen Councils" in letters dripping menacingly in Sandinista red and black ink.

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Wide Cast of Characters...Going Beyond the Usual Suspects?
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¶17. (U) An eclectic crowd participated the march, from former presidential candidates Jose Rizo of the Liberal

Constitutional Party (PLC) and Eduardo Montealegre of the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), various National Assembly Deputies including Maria Eugenia Sequeira (ALN) and Enrique Quinones (PLC), as well as Azalia Aviles of the Conservative Party (PC)-ALN alliance. A number of ALN mayors from the Department of Matagalpa, including Bronley Alvarez, mayor of Ciudad Dario, joined the mix. As did members of the dissident Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) alliance and followers of the late Herty Lewites, former MRS mayor of Managua and presidential candidate. There was a diverse non-political presence as well, including a group of Nicaraguans from Costa Rica and others who advocated for allowing Nicaraguans living abroad the right to vote and for expanding the national identification card (cedula) registration campaign. Cristiana Chamorro, daughter of President Violeta B. Chamorro; Margarita Gurdian former Minister of Health under President Bolanos, and Nelson Estrada of MpN were among other prominent civic leaders who participated. Representatives throughout the country attended, including delegations from Matagalpa, Esteli, Chinandega, Leon, Granada, Carazo, Rivas, as well as a committee from Bluefields on behalf of the Atlantic Coast.

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The Party Crashers
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¶8. (C) Shortly after the march commenced, a ragtag group of about 20 to 30 young men with attitude approached from stage left, marking their entrance with exploding firecrackers and cutting through the main route of the march. Many of them wore T-shirts announcing their affiliation with the Fraternity of Saint Jerome, a Masaya-based FSLN organization associated with the Catholic Church which purportedly receives funding from Daniel Ortega. Some appeared to be armed with musical instruments--one was carrying a large tuba, as if on their way to or from a church event. Others shared the shoulder load of long sticks of thin dry kindling wood suggesting the possibility of plans to light a fire. A pick-up truck that apparently belonged to the Masaya mayor's office brought up the rear. (Comment: The mayor of Masaya is FSLN.) The marchers let them pass through peacefully; both the rally crashers and participants chose to ignore each other.

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Aleman, The Wet Blanket
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¶9. (U) Likely galled by the open participation of fellow members of his PLC party, some of whom walked near Jose Rizo, while others kept company with Enrique Quinones, ex-President and convicted felon Arnoldo Aleman was not amused by the march and disparaged the NGOs for mixing it up with the political parties. In its account of the march, leading daily La Prensa quoted Aleman saying, "Who elected Violeta Granera? If they (MpN) want to be a party, they should form a party." He asserted that he knew how independent organizations were supposed to act, and in his view the movement was acting more like a political party than an NGO. Aleman accused MpN of essentially stealing the thunder from the PLC which he insisted had engineered the reform of article 11 of Law 290 in the National Assembly.

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Comment
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¶10. (C) We are encouraged by the success of the rally and the participation of the range of political parties and civic groups. MpN has proved up to the task of mobilizing civil society and is reenergized in the current environment. By drawing a diverse crowd from across the ideological spectrum to the cause of defending liberty and encouraging national unity in the wake of the Hurricane Felix tragedy, MpN demonstrated that civil society has a critical role to play in challenging efforts by Ortega to consolidate and perpetuate his hold on power. The collective opposition to

the CPCs and the desire to help fellow citizens on the Atlantic Coast offered common ground for people from different parties to work together. MpN and the civil movement will need additional resources and training if they are going to be able to strengthen, broaden, and reinforce the positive momentum from the Sunday rally.

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